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Following the return of the Catholic Church in 1377, the clergy sought to restore the walled city's luster. Nicholas V circa 1450 commenced construction of the Apostolic Palace, eventually the permanent home of his successors, and his collection of books became the foundation of the Vatican Library. In the 1470s, Sixtus IV began work on the famed Sistine Chapel, featuring frescoes created by such leading Renaissance artists as Botticelli and Perugino.

Significant changes to the city took place after Julius II became pope in 1503. Julius commissioned Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling in 1508, and tapped architect Donato Bramante design the Belvedere Courtyard. The pontiff also elected to tear down the 1,200-year-old St. Peter's Basilica and have Bramante build a new one in its place.

The death of Julius in 1513 and Bramante the following year led to a decades-long dispute over how to continue the project, until Michelangelo ended the deadlock in 1547 with his choice to follow Bramante's original design. Giacomo della Porta completed St. Peter's celebrated dome in 1590, and work on the grand structure finally finished in 1626. Measuring 452 feet tall and encompassing 5.7 acres, the new St. Peter's stood as the world's biggest church until the completion of the Ivory Coast's Basilica of Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro in 1989.

The Vatican Museums originated from the sculpture collection of Julius II, its earliest gallery opened to the public by Pope Clement XIV in 1773 and expanded by Pope Pius VI. Subsequent popes continued to bolster the renowned collections over the years, with the Gregorian Egyptian Museum, the Ethnological Museum and the Collection of Modern and Contemporary Religious Art among the additions.

Popes traditionally held power over regional territories known as the Papal States until 1870, when the unified Italian government claimed virtually all of the land outside of the city walls. A standoff between the church and secular government ensued for the next 60 years, until an agreement reached with the Lateran Pacts in February 1929. Signed by Benito Mussolini on behalf of King Victor Emmanuel III, the pacts established Vatican City as a sovereign entity distinct from the Holy See, and granted the church $92 million as compensation for the loss of the Papal

States.

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